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ABSTRACT

A study of the 1980 debate between Republican presidential candidates Ronald Reagan and George Bush demonstrates what influence, if any, a debate has on the voting public. The unit of analysis used in the study was each single message presented by each candidate without interruption by the other candidate or the moderator. Two investigators made independent decisions in the coding process and then compared their markings. There was a total of 26 candidate messages for Reagan and 18 for Bush. Unequivocal messages, ambiguous messages, reasoning processes, and other rhetorical features were noted for each message. In terms of clarity and ambiguity, (1) both candidates incorporated a direct statement of policy in over 80% of their messages; (2) neither candidate used unequivocal rhetorical devices extensively; (3) both candidates talked frequently about the position of an opponent, used emotional appeals, and failed to develop effective transitions in some of their messages; and (4) Bush used unfamiliar jargon in about half of his messages and sometimes did not explain or develop his ideas. Overall, Reagan appeared to rely on numeral facts, Bush more on philosophical arguments. (HTH)

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A VERBAL ANALYSIS OF THE 1980 HOUSTON REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

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A VERBAL ANALYSIS OF THE 1980

HOUSTON REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

Introduction

The study of presidential political debates has become an increasingly popular activity for communication researchers. For both the 1960 and 1976 Presidential campaigns, televised debates were provided to the American people; communication researchers as well as political and mass media analysts seized the opportunity quickly to disect these events. The rationale for doing so lay in the potential impact of these debates. In the 1960 Presidential campaign, the four televised debates between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon were considered to be "the really decisive factor in the election."[1] According to Roper, six percent of the American voters, over four million people, made their final decision relative to the candidates on the basis of the debates.[2] The audience for these four debates was estimated at the time by Arbitron, a rating agency representing the major television networks, to be approximately sixty-three million people.[3] This figure represented the largest audience ever assembled for a speaking event up to that time. In the 1976 Presidential campaign, three debates between Presidential candidates Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford and one debate between Vice-Presidential candidates Walter Mondale and Robert Dole were held. The first Carter-Ford debate drew 72% of the American households according to the Nielsen ratings and the last one drew 60%. Gallup estimates ranged from 67% to 70% for the Carter-Ford debates for registered voters across the country. Ranges for other polling organizations (Roper, Harris, Associated Press) were from 64% to 67%.[4]

The debates have provided the American public an alternative source of information about the candidates. These events allow viewers to compare

opposing candidates in a single context simultaneously. While there are restrictions imposed upon the debate such as question and answer rules (for example, in terms of speaking time, response pattern, initiation of subjects), they do provide an opportunity for voters to see them for an extended period of time, without media selective exposure and without crowd interference (normally seen in the daily coverage of the campaign trail).

The 1980 Presidential campaign provided an additional opportunity for voters to study candidates. The Republicans, with seven viable candidates announcing their intention to run for the Presidency, decided early in the primary campaign to hold debates in various cities from January through April to assist the voters in making clear distictions between the candidates and offering them nationwide visibility. This was an important decision at a time when the Presidential incumbent was a Democrat and some of the seven Republican contenders were relatively unknown to a nationwide audience.

Six Republican primary debates were held in Iowa, New Hampshire (twice), Illinois, South Carolina, and Texas, with some, but not all, of the candidates appearing in each, because of withdrawal from the race or a personal decision not to do so; all seven candidates appeared in at least one of these speaking events.

The last of these Republican primary debates, held in Houston, Texas, on April 23, 1980, at the Albert Thomas Convention Center, featured the two candidates left in the race, former Governor Ronald Reagan and former Ambassador George Bush. These contenders three months later (as a result of the proceedings at the Republican Convention in Detroit) were, of course, to become running mates in the 1980 Presidential campaign against the Carter-Mondale ticket, with Reagan in the Presidential slot and Bush in the Vice-Presidential slot. The day before the debate, Bush had won an impressive

victory over Reagan in the Pennsylvania primary. At this stage in the Republican primary campaign, Ronald Reagan had the commitment of 418 delegates and Bush had 96 delegates, with 998 required to receive the party nomination. The Texas primary was to be the next one on the schedule, May 3; Reagan had won over Ford in Texas in 1976, Texas was the home state for Bush.

The format for the sixty-minute debate provided relatively open discussion and freedom of direction. This was in contrast to other such debates, for example, the one between Reagan and Anderson in Baltimore in September (as Presidential contenders), in which six prepared questions were offered by journalists with a time limit on responses and definitive restrictions on speaking order and frequency per question. For the Houston debate, subjects were generally initiated by the moderator, news correspondent Howard K. Smith (although candidates were permitted to address questions to one another). There were no limitations on speaking time for the candidates. A one-minute closing statement was given by each candidate. Just prior to this, four audience questions were presented to the contenders. Audience reaction to comments made by the candidates was permitted until the moderator indicated that applause should be held until the end of the debate. The moderator played, on the whole, a minimal role in the interaction. To the degree that it was possible, the debate appeared as a conversation between the candidates for the benefit of the television and convention center audience.

Several rhetorical studies have been conducted of the 1960 and 1976 Presidential debates. The approach to these analyses has varied, but all share in common the premise that the verbal content of these debates influences the audience in making voting decisions. A sampling of those studies

will be offered here, in order to provide a framework for the specific methodology chosen for the present analysis.

Samovar conducted a rhetorical analysis of the 1960 Presidential debates between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon.[5] This analysis focused upon unequivocal and ambiguous passages in the debates. In order to assign clarity or ambiguity to passages, the researcher had panelists (communication specialists and then randomly selected Republicans and Democrats in the community) review key debate passages. From this point, the researcher determined particular rhetorical characteristics contributing to the clarity or ambiguity assigned to the passages. For unequivocal messages, he noted the following rhetorical characteristics: direct statement of policy, development and explanation, rhetorical questions posed and answered, use of redundancy, use of support and evidence, and restatement of position at conclusion. For ambiguous messages, he noted the following rhetorical characteristics: talking about the position of an opponent or that of both candidates, use of unfamiliar jargon, lack of development and explanation, ineffective transitions, use of emotional appeals, use of loaded language and emotional proof, unanswered rhetorical questions, and contradictions in messages.

Bechtolt, Hilyard, and Bybee performed a content analysis of the 1976 Presidential debates between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.[6] Using thirty-second excerpts of each of the debates as the unit for analysis, the researchers examined candidate topic initiation, topic time, the utilization of issue versus image topics. The subject of issue versus image content has also been discussed by Kraus in an analysis of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates and possible debates in 1964.[7]

Jackson-Beeck and Meadow conducted a content analysis of the first Presidential debate of both the 1960 and 1976 campaigns.[8] Their data

classification scheme was defined by two dimensions: message consciousness and message ambiguity. According to these researchers, televised communication events can be examined in terms of four types of communication content, either one by one or in combinations: (1) high message consciousness, low message ambiguity ("manifest" content); (2) high message consciousness, high message ambiguity (metaphor, imagery, analogy); (3) low message consciousness, low message ambiguity (stuttering, incoherency, vocalized pauses); and (4) low message consciousness, high message ambiguity (body language, physiological responses).

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, various aspects of message unequivocality and message ambiguity,[9] reasoning, and other verbal features of the Houston debate were examined.[10] The unit of analysis employed in this study was each single message presented by each candidate without interruption by the other candidate or by the moderator. The rationale for doing so appeared to the researchers as a means to view each unit of information perceived by the audience in relationship to a candidate as the interaction moved back and forth between Reagan and Bush on the various debate topics. It should be further noted that if a particular rhetorical characteristic were present once or more in a single message, it was marked on the coding sheet only as present; the number of times it may have been evidenced in the message was not noted. If a message was considered as containing redundancies, it was simply coded as having the rhetorical characteristic present; the individual redundant instances in the message were not counted. The fact that the rhetorical characteristic was present or absent in a particular message seemed to be the important focal point to the researchers in envisioning the

audience perception of a candidate message. The one exception to this methodological approach was in the instance of nonfluencies; here, the number was counted for each candidate not by each single message, but by the culmination of messages for each candidate so that a total comparison could be made, as well as an average for each candidate per message (total nonfluencies for a candidate divided by the number of candidate messages).

In order to conduct the rhetorical analysis, the Houston debate was video-taped by the researchers and a verbatim transcript was prepared. From the transcript and the audio portion of the tape, the researchers examined each candidate message for the rhetorical characteristics under investigation.[11] The two investigators made independent decisions in the coding process and then compared their markings; in almost every instance, their notations were in agreement. If not, then a review of the particular message was performed until resolution was made. All messages were viewed by the investigators twice for independent coding.

Results

There were a total of forty-four candidate messages in the debate, twenty-six for Reagan and eighteen for Bush. Total message time was 45.02 minutes (2,701 seconds), or 62.07 seconds per message: Reagan, 25.55 minutes (1,533 seconds) or 58.96 seconds per message; Bush, 19.47 minutes (1,168 seconds) or 64.89 seconds per message. Reagan had approximately six more minutes of message time than did Bush; Reagan averaged approximately six seconds less per message than did Bush. Reagan used 57% of the candidate message time, Bush used 43%. Fourteen different topics were featured in the debate, with Reagan the initial respondent six times and the concluding respondent eleven times. Bush was the initial speaker on a topic eight times

and the concluding speaker three times. In terms of issue information, Reagan offered it in 92% of his messages and Bush in 89% of his messages. Image information was provided by Reagan in 85% of his messages and by Bush in 94% of his messages.

Unequivocal Messages

Unequivocal messages were noted in the debate on the basis of the rhetorical characteristics identified by Samovar.[12] Six such characteristics were examined: direct statement of policy, development and explanation, rhetorical questions posed and answered, use of redundancy, use of support and evidence, and restatement of position at conclusion. A direct statement of policy was contained in 81% of the Reagan messages and 94% of the Bush messages. With the direct statement of policy, the voter knows exactly where a candidate stands on an issue. For example, when Reagan spoke on the issue of foreign affairs, he said:

> Where people want to be free from Soviet or Cuban domination . . . the United States should be willing to provide weapons to any men that want to fight for their freedom against those hostile forces.

Another example of a direct statement of policy occurred when Bush, in commenting on the tax cut issue, said:

> I believe that before we can have massive across-the-board tax cuts, we've got to get the budget in balance, so I am proposing a twenty billion dollar, as opposed to 70 or 90, supply-side tax cut to stimulate savings for homes, to stimulate business.

Development and explanation was provided in 46% of the Reagan messages and 78% of the Bush messages. By developing and explaining his message, a

candidate insures himself a greater probability that his audience will see the message as it was intended. For example, when Bush spoke on the issue of the recession, he said:

> There are programs that will help for retraining. I like the idea of training people in the private sector for jobs that exist through tax credit, rather than to train them up in the CETA program that gets some kid's hopes up. He really wants to work, gets his hopes up, and then there's no government job for him.

Another example of development and explanation was offered by Reagan in commenting on the accuracy of his figures used in the campaign:

> . . . I took the figure that was used for redistribution of income outside of social security to people below the poverty level and divided it into the total figure, and it came out that if the people below the poverty level were getting all of the money in that budget, a family of four would be receiving twenty-seven thousand dollars a year, which is about four times as much as they are receiving, and I figured that made 3 to 1 overhead.

The researchers found that rhetorical questions were posed and answered in 8% of the Reagan messages and 6% of the Bush messages. Using such a technique allows a candidate to clarify his opinions or positions on an issue by setting up a question-answer framework for them. For example, Reagan utilized this technique in speaking on the subject of Russia and foreign affairs:

> I wonder whether they are prepared for a possible escalation-conflict with us at this time. They are aggressive against an Afghanistan and an Africa and so forth, and even though they have a lead on us in virtually everything, I don't think that maybe they're prepared at this time to dare the possible -- well, they don't want the confrontation directly with the United States.

An example of a Bush message utilizing this technique was provided in his comments regarding the Castro regime:

> . . . so what do you do about it? You change your naive foreign policy that considers this guy as some kind of person that is really going to live comfortably inside that island.

Redundancy was employed by Reagan in 8% of his messages and by Bush in 11% of his messages. This device increases the probability of an audience receiving the intended message; it enhances message clarity, since people are more likely to comprehend a concept when it is stated more than once.

Support and evidence was a feature of 46% of the Reagan messages and 39% of the Bush messages. This device adds credibility to and provides back-up data for the candidate message. For example, Bush in his comments about the tax cut issue said:

> President Kennedy suggested this cut. It was implemented by Johnson. The cut was 11.4 billion. It resulted in a 4.4 billion dollar revenue loss. Inflation then was 1.8%, today it's 18%. Investor confidence was out there, today there's none.

Another example of the use of support and evidence was contained in a Reagan message in his comments about the recession:

> The American voter today is saving the lowest percentage of his earnings at any time in the last thirty odd years. And a Japanese worker can save five times the percentage of his earnings that an American can, West German three times.

Reagan restated his position at the conclusion of 8% of his messages, and Bush in 28% of his messages, presumably aiding the audience in clearly perceiving their comments. For example, at the conclusion of a message pertaining to taxes, Reagan indicated:

> And so I support and stand by the idea of incentive taxes geared to the free enterprise system that will provide incentive to increase productivity, so we can compete in the international market which we can't do on even terms today.

Another example was provided in the following Bush message dealing with the energy issue:

> And so my energy program is not just decontrol and figure we can get it all in Alaska, but it's to use alternative sources of energy, go with decontrol, of course, and to use alternative sources of energy as well.

Ambiguous Messages

Ambiguous messages were noted in the debate on the basis of the rhetorical characteristics identified by Samovar.[13] Eight such characteristics were examined: talking about the position of an opponent or that of both candidates,[14] use of unfamiliar jargon, lack of development and explanation, ineffective transitions, use of emotional appeals, use of loaded language and emotional proof, unanswered rhetorical questions, and contradictions in messages.

Both Reagan and Bush frequently mentioned the position of other Presidential candidates in their messages or made a comparison between theirs and that of an opponent. Reagan did this in 42% of his messages and Bush did it in 67% of his messages. This presents ambiguity to an audience, since it is often difficult to separate the various candidate positions and attach them to the appropriate individuals.

For example, Bush in commenting about the tax cut issue made reference to his opponent when he said:

> You favor increasing defense and you favor cutting out inheritance and gift taxes, and I believe that you're going to end up with a much bigger deficit and that's where you and I differ.

An example of a Reagan message in which this happens would be in a comment he made in discussing the recession:

> President Carter, as a candidate, said that he would never fight inflation by using unemployment. President Carter, in his present economic message, has said that as part of his fight against inflation, unemployment is going to be

> allowed to go up one to one and a half, or two percentage points.

Bush employed what would seem to be unfamiliar jargon in 56% of his messages, making the clarity of his intended message more difficult to attain for the audience. Reagan generally refrained from using unfamiliar jargon; only one of his messages employed any jargon ("incentive taxes"). Examples of unfamiliar Bush terms would be: "supply-side tax cuts," "interdiction," "dialectic," "hegemony," "attrition," and "exacerbate."

Lack of development and explanation in a candidate message leaves an audience uncertain about the intended thoughts to be conveyed. In 8% of the Reagan messages and 39% of the Bush messages, there was a lack of development and explanation. An example of an undeveloped or unexplained Reagan message would be a comment he made in discussing the recession:

> . . . I want to see an increase in productivity too, and all I can say I think the system you're talking about we've been trying for a lot of years really off and on. And I think it is time for something new, and I think what is new is let's believe in the people once again, and that they can spend money smarter than the government can.

An example of an undeveloped or unexplained Bush message may be found in a comment he made in reference to the recession:

> My problem with Jimmy Carter -- when he came in, he addressed himself to one thing--stimulation of the employment sector and lowering of unemployment, and he did that to some degree for awhile, but inflation went right off the charts because of these wreckless deficits.

Ineffective transitions were a part of 35% of the Reagan messages and 22% of the Bush messages. This problem makes it hard for an audience to follow what is being said and to tie the thoughts together into a cohesive message with an intended meaning.

An example of a Bush message containing ineffective transitions would be in comments he made about government spending and energy policies:

> . . . they don't feel any of this recession. They don't feel any of the layoffs that the steelworkers felt or some of the people around here are beginning to feel. And so that's what I'd do on that one. On energy, I don't believe frankly that there's enough oil in Alaska within the reasonable future to replace the nine million barrels everyday that we get from overseas . . . .

Reagan committed the same kind of error when, in discussing the recession, he said:

> Well, he's the biggest spender that's ever been in the White House, and I feel when you said stimulate, provide incentive for increased productivity, the American worker today is saving the lowest percentage of his earnings at any time in the last thirty odd years.

Reagan employed emotional appeals in 31% of his messages and Bush in 56% of his messages. In this case, presumably the audience was moved from the objective level of a message and hence from clarity of thought. Both investigators noted that the Bush technique in this regard was tied more to his dynamic delivery than specific words. Reagan utilized an emotional appeal in his closing statement when he said:

> In the 18th century, we created here in this land the freest, most unique society that has ever been known to man. In the 19th century, we built the greatest industrial power that the world has ever seen, and we have spent most of the 20th century apologizing, and I don't know what we're apologizing for. I think that living Americans today have fought harder, have done more for the dignity of man than any people who've ever lived on this earth . . . .

An example of a Bush message using an emotional appeal was evidenced in a comment he made in regard to the tax cut issue:

> Your plan, in my judgment, in the judgment of many economists, would risk exacerbating that deficit, and today our creditors abroad--our economy is linked to foreign economy--and they take a look at us and see us living at deficit after deficit ...I don't think we can take that kind of risk, Governor, and I would not propose it.

Loaded language and emotional proof appeared in 12% of the Reagan messages and 22% of the Bush messages. In a statement pertaining to the Iranian crisis, Bush said:

> I think the risk would rather be internally in Iran where you are dealing with <u>outrageous</u>, <u>wreckless</u> people who have no respect for international law.

On the same subject, Reagan commented as follows:

> One of their officials that we sent back just the other day--one of the diplomats--his speech when he arrived was boasting of how they rubbed our face in the dirt all this time . . . .

Unanswered rhetorical questions leave the audience to fill in the gaps, thereby reducing clarity. Reagan failed to answer such a question in 12% of his messages and Bush in 6% of his messages. Reagan, for example, did not answer his question, "How much more risk is there in just going along with what we've been doing?" when he was making comments pertaining to the tax cut issue. Bush failed to answer his question, "What possible hope do countries have that want to be free of this kind of aggression?" when he was speaking on the issue of foreign affairs.

Neither candidate, in the opinion of the investigators, appeared to put forth contradictions in his messages. Had they done so, it would have obviously hampered the clarity of their messages.

Reasoning

Seven types of reasoning techniques in the candidate messages were examined by the researchers: (1) use of analogy, (2) use of historical references, (3) use of factual illustration, (4) use of hypothetical illustration, (5) use of a syllogism, (6) use of inductive reasoning, and (7) use of deductive reasoning. An assumption was made by the investigators that such reasoning techniques would enhance message clarity; the data emerging from the text of the candidate messages appears to generally support this assumption by way of effective, concrete uses of reasoning to illustrate or organize arguments around a point rather than to mislead the audience into inappropriate abstraction.

The use of an analogy appeared in 12% of the Reagan messages and 6% of

the Bush messages. In an attempt to make a point vivid, Bush made a comment to the effect: "That is just the tip of the iceberg." Reagan, in referring to the Castro regime, made the comment: "They are also threatening to choke off our life lines." In speaking about the illegal alien issue, Reagan said: "This is the only safety valve right now they have with that unemployment that probably keeps the lid from blowing off down there."

Historical references were employed by Reagan in 31% of his messages and by Bush in 61% of his messages. These references would seem to provide support to assertions made by the candidates. Both Reagan and Bush made reference to their own political history, as well as of other political figures and administrations. An example of a Reagan message utilizing this technique would be:

> Four times in this century, we have had across-the-board tax cuts, all of which have resulted in such an increase in prosperity that the government even in the first year got increased revenues, not less.

Bush imposed an historical reference in a message pertaining to government spending:

> Jimmy Carter fought the Leach Amendment. That would have set a ceiling on federal employment through attrition. Nobody would have been thrown out of a job, but if people left, some would not be replaced. He fought against that.

Factual illustration was utilized by Reagan in 50% of his messages and by Bush in 39% of his messages. These illustrations provide support to ideas expressed by the candidates. Bush employed a factual illustration in a discussion about the effectiveness of government:

> Government has moved in on the private sector with so much regulation. I built a business right here in Texas, started it from scratch and when we started out there into the Gulf to drill a well, we needed, I think, two permits. Today, I'm told it's twelve permits. Every time you turn around there is too much regulation.

Reagan employed this technique in commenting on the subject of the recession:

> Proposition 13 -- everyone in the country heard the horrifying tales of what was going to happen if they cut the property tax as much as Proposition 13 said they were going to. Well, it's been in effect eighteen months now and the result is there are a hundred thousand fewer public workers, but the private sector in these eighteen months has created 532,000 new jobs and the State of California ended up with a three hundred billion dollar surplus.

Hypothetical illustration was employed by Reagan in 23% of his messages and by Bush in 39% of his messages. These illustrations provide the audience a sense of what will happen, in the opinion of the candidate, if certain things were to occur or what might have happened if certain things had taken place. It can give the audience a sense of how the candidate would handle a particular problem. Reagan utilized this approach in his comments about the tax cut issue:

> Now, over the last ten years, if things aren't changed, it is estimated that the total tax increase on the people of America will be one and a half trillion dollars.

Bush likewise used this approach in discussing foreign affairs:

> If Afghanistan were invaded or if someplace in the Middle East were threatened when I was President, I would not respond against Cuba . . . . We got problems with Cuba, one-on-one with those problems. Don't link them in order to solve something half way around the world. That's my view of foreign policy.

Syllogisms, a reasoning device containing a major premise, minor premise, and a conclusion, if valid, provide the audience a logical argument to support a point. True syllogisms were not used by either Reagan or Bush in any of their messages.

Inductive reasoning was employed in 23% of the Reagan messages and 22% of the Bush messages. Here, the reasoning pattern moves from specifics to formulation of a generalization. Reagan utilized inductive reasoning, in discussing the effectiveness of government, when he said:

> If Americans since 1950, in the last thirty years, had been able to save and invest, if our economy had grown only 1½% more a year, our incomes would be 50% higher, jobs would be plentiful, we'd have a balanced budget, lower payroll taxes instead of higher, stable prices, a solvent social security program, and our industrial economy would be three times as great as that of the Soviet Union, and we would have unquestioned military superiority.

Deductive reasoning was used in 31% of the Reagan messages and 28% of the Bush messages. Here, the reasoning moves from a generalization to an

application in a specific case. Bush employed deductive reasoning when he commented on the Soviet Union:

> Now I believe the evidence is overwhelming that they seek superiority not parity . . . the Soviets are aggressive, they have overstated in Afghanistan, they have bitten off more than, in my judgment, they should be allowed to digest.

Reagan employed deductive reasoning in a message pertaining to the hostage crisis in Iran:

> Well, it's difficult to talk about what is a viable option now as we're late in the sixth month of their captivity, because, first of all, is the fear that something might endanger them further, but second is also if you do have a good idea of something that should be done, I don't think we should say it out loud and let the Iranians hear about it.

Other Rhetorical Features

Seven other rhetorical features were measured by the investigators in the candidate messages: (1) use of humor, (2) use of fear appeals, (3) non-fluencies, (4) one-sided message, (5) two-sided message, (6) conversational speaking style, and (7) dynamic speaking style.

Humor was incorporated into 39% of the Reagan messages and 11% of the Bush messages. This correlates with Reagan's greater reliance upon a conversational speaking style (89% of his messages) and Bush's greater reliance upon a dynamic speaking style (83% of his messages). Humor was most likely employed in these messages as a tension reliever and to establish rapport with the audience; it appeared to the investigators that it was not used

unjudiciously. Reagan used humor in discussing the effectiveness of government: "I wouldn't believe HEW if they were here in the room saying that." Bush employed humor in a message when discussing foreign affairs: "Jimmy Carter didn't invent morality in foreign policy."

Fear appeals were incorporated into 4% of the Reagan messages and 22% of the Bush messages. Fear appeals would seem to be particularly effective if backed by supportive statements and a plausible plan of action; obviously, the predispositions of audience members are key here. Both investigators noted that the Bush fear appeal was tied very closely to his dynamic speaking style, not just his choice of words. Bush used a fear appeal technique when, in speaking on the tax cut issue, he said:

> . . . if we risk, with investor confidence where it is, a deficit that's going to be up already, I think, thirty seven billion, thirty billion on top of that, I'm afarid we can't break inflation, and we've got to do that and do it fast.

Nonfluencies were counted and averaged for all the candidate messages. Included in this count were false starts, repetitions, cases of stuttering, and blocks. Seventy instances of nonfluencies were tabulated for each candidate, with an average of 2.69 per message for Reagan (26 messages) and 3.89 per message for Bush (18 messages).

The one-sided message versus two-sided message preference would seem to vary as a function of candidate predisposition of individual audience members, the organizational quality of the arguments, and whether the audience was already aware of the counterarguments. The two-sided approach would seem to have been especially effective if the candidate was able to clearly refute the logic of the opposing arguments. Reagan utilized the

one-sided approach in 27% of his messages and the two-sided approach in 15% of his messages. Bush employed the one-sided approach in 17% of his messages and the two-sided approach in 11% of his messages.

Discussion

A number of comparisons in the rhetorical styles of the two candidates are possible from the data collected. Both Reagan and Bush made frequent use of a direct statement of policy (81% and 94% of their messages, respectively). Bush managed to incorporate development and explanation in almost twice as many of his messages as Reagan (78% and 46% of their messages, respectively). Little use of either posing and answering rhetorical questions or redundancy was evidenced in the candidate messages. Both Reagan and Bush incorporated support and evidence quite frequently in their messages (46% and 39% of their messages, respectively). Bush restated his position at the conclusion of a message three times more frequently than Reagan (28% and 8% of their messages, respectively).

In terms of ambiguous rhetorical characteristics, moderate contrast between the two candidates is evident. Bush talked about the position of an opponent (with or without mentioning his own) about one and a half times as much as Reagan (67% and 42% of their messages, respectively). Both candidates did so in a considerable number of their messages. Bush used unfamiliar jargon in 56% of his messages, Reagan did so only once. Lack of development and explanation appeared in almost five times as many Bush messages as Reagan messages (39% and 8% of their messages, respectively). Ineffective transitions were a feature of a little over a third of the Reagan messages (35%) but only a little over a fifth of the Bush messages (22%). The use of emotional appeals appeared in considerably more Bush messages (56%)

than Reagan messages; this device was used rather frequently by both candidates. Loaded language and emotional proof appeared more infrequently in the Reagan messages (12%) than in the Bush messages (22%). Neither candidate posed more than a few rhetorical questions and failed to answer them. Contradictions were not a part of either the Reagan or Bush messages.

In regard to reasoning strategies, some contrast between candidates is apparent. Analogies were used infrequently by both candidates (present in 12% of the Reagan messages, 6% of the Bush messages). Historical references were used twice as often by Bush as by Reagan (61% and 31% of their messages, respectively). Both candidates used factual illustrations rather frequently, Reagan more so than Bush (50% and 39% of their messages, respectively). Hypothetical illustrations were used more frequently by Bush than Reagan (39% and 23% of their messages, respectively). Syllogisms were employed in none of the candidate messages. Candidates used inductive reasoning to the same degree (23% of the Reagan messages and 22% of the Bush messages). Deductive reasoning was incorporated almost equally in the Reagan and Bush messages (31% and 28% of their messages, respectively).

Other rhetorical devices were used differentially by the two candidates. Humor was used almost four times more often by Reagan than by Bush (39% and 11% of their messages, respectively). Fear appeals were employed in considerably more Bush messages (22%) than Reagan messages (4%). Nonfluencies appeared with greater frequency per message for Bush (average: 3.89) than for Reagan (average: 2.69). The one-sided message approach was used slightly more frequently by Reagan than Bush (27% and 17% of their messages, respectively). The candidates employed the two-sided message approach about equally (15% of the Reagan messages, 11% of the Bush messages). Probably, the strongest contrast between the candidates was evidenced in the use of

controversial versus a dynamic speaking style. While Reagan relied heavily on a controversial speaking style (89% of his messages), Bush relied heavily on a dynamic speaking style (83% of his messages).

From this, one can conclude that both candidates made frequent use of a direct statement of policy, development and explanation, and support and evidence. They both talked frequently about the position of their opponents and used emotional appeals. Additionally, both candidates frequently incorporated historical references and factual illustrations.

In regard to differences between the candidates, one can conclude that Reagan: (1) used development and explanation far less frequently, (2) restated his position at the conclusion of a message far less frequently, (3) used unfamiliar jargon on only one occasion, (4) failed in developing and explaining his points far less frequently, (5) failed in making effective transitions more frequently, (6) used emotional appeals far less frequently, (7) employed historical references and hypothetical illustrations less frequently, (8) used factual illustrations less frequently, (9) employed humor more frequently, and (10) relied far more on a conversational speaking style than his opponent.

On the other hand, Bush: (1) used development and explanation far more frequently, (2) restated his position at the conclusion of a message far more frequently, (3) employed unfamiliar jargon in over half of his messages, (4) failed in developing and explaining his messages far more frequently, (5) failed in making effective transitions less frequently, (6) used emotional appeals far more frequently, (7) employed historical references almost twice as often and hypothetical illustrations more frequently, (8) used factual illustrations less frequently, (9) employed humor less frequently, and (10) relied far more on a dynamic speaking style than his opponent.

In terms of clarity and ambiguity, one can conclude that: (1) both candidates incorporated a direct statement of policy about equally and in over 80% of their messages, development and explanation in a considerable number of their messages (with Bush almost doubling Reagan in this category), and support and evidence in a considerable number of their messages, presumably leading to message clarity specifically in terms of the intended meaning; (2) neither candidate used the other possible unequivocal rhetorical devices noted by Samovar[15] extensively (posing and answering rhetorical questions, redundancy, restating a position at the conclusion of a message); (3) both candidates talked frequently about the position of an opponent, used emotional appeals, and failed to develop effective transitions in some of their messages, presumably providing ambiguity in the minds of their receivers; (4) Bush utilized unfamiliar jargon in about one-half of his messages, and sometimes did not develop or explain the ideas in his messages, leading to further ambiguity; (5) if one can assume that reasoning and illustration can lead to greater message clarity, then one can conclude that the frequent use of historical references (almost twice as much by Bush as Reagan), factual illustrations, hypothetical illustrations, inductive reasoning, and deductive reasoning, was beneficial tc both candidates.

It is difficult to say who won this debate on the basis of the rhetorical qualities evident. One news journalist referred to it as simply a "Republican commercial for the fall election,"[16] with the only candidate differences on issues revealed on the subjects of the tax cut and the blockade of Cuba. Overall, Reagan appeared to rely on numerical facts, Bush more on philosophical arguments. Both candidates seemed more intent on concentrating their attacks on their Democratic adversary, President Jimmy Carter, than on one another.

There are several limitations to the study which can be brought forth. First, the two investigators, while making every attempt to be thorough in

their analysis, were the only raters of the verbal content in the debate. Second, the analysis was focused on the rhetorical characteristics present in the candidate interaction and not the issue content or the sequential pattern between the candidate comments (for example, in the sense of relational analysis). Third, and perhaps most important, no actual data was collected on the perceptions of the audience, either in the convention center or in front of a television set. As in the majority of studies of this type, the researchers make determinations about the rhetorical characteristics of the debate without knowing whether the audience perceived the messages in the same way; it becomes a matter of inferences. The influence of debates has been repeatedly demonstrated.[17] The question left to this particular debate is whether the rhetorical characteristics noted in this study lead in any way to the actions taken by the individual audience member in the voting booth.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Editorial in the New York Times, November 6, 1960.

[2]Elmo Roper, "Polling Post-Mortem," Saturday Review, 43 (November 26, 1960), 10-13.

[3]Frank Stanton, "An Appeal to the American People," TV Guide (January 14-20, 1961), 26.

[4]J. Robinson, "Poll Results on the Debates," in The Great Debates, 1976: Ford vs. Carter, edited by Sidney Kraus (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1979),

[5]Larry A. Samovar, "Ambiguity and Unequivocation in the Kennedy-Nixon Television Debates," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 48 (1962), 277-279; Larry A. Samovar, "Ambiguity and Unequivocation in the Kennedy-Nixon Television Debates: A Rhetorical Analysis," Western Speech, 29 (1965), 211-218.

[6]Warren E. Bechtolt, Joseph Hilyard, and Carl R. Bybee, "Agenda Control in the 1976 Debates: A Content Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, 54 (1977), 674-681.

[7]Sidney Kraus, "Presidential Debates in 1964," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 50 (1964), 19-23.

[8]Marilyn Jackson-Beeck and Robert G. Meadow, "Content Analysis of Televised Communication Events: The Presidential Debates," Communication Research, 6 (1979), 321-344.

[9]Message unequivocality and message ambiguity were viewed in this study in terms of the rhetorical characteristics identified by Samovar (1962, 1965) in his research of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates.

[10]A nonverbal analysis of the Houston debate is currently underway by the authors.

[11]See Appendix A for a copy of the verbal coding sheet employed in this research.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]For the purposes of this debate, this included references to the positions of the other Republican candidate, Independent candidate John Anderson, or either Democratic candidate, Jimmy Carter or Edward Kennedy.

[15]Ibid.

[16]William Endicott, "Carter Target in GOP Debate," The Los Angeles Times (April 24, 1980), 12.

[17]Steven H. Chaffee, "Presidential Debates--Are They Helpful to Voters," Communication Monographs, 45 (1978), 330-346.

APPENDIX A

VERBAL CODING SHEET

Number of Candidate Message: _____

Candidate: _____ Reagan

_____ Bush

Verbal Context of Message: _____

1 = response to Moderator
2 = response to Reagan
3 = response to Bush
4 = response to audience member
5 = closing statement

Length of message (in seconds): _____

Unequivocal Messages: _____

1 = direct statement of policy
2 = development and explanation
3 = rhetorical questions posed and answered
4 = redundancy
5 = support and evidence
6 = restatement of position at conclusion

Ambiguous Messages: _____

1 = talk about position of a Presidential candidate opponent or that of both candidates
2 = unfamiliar jargon
3 = lack of development and explanation
4 = ineffective transitions
5 = use of emotional appeals
6 = loaded language and emotional proof
7 = unanswered rhetorical questions
8 = contradictions in messages

Topics: _____

1 = issue information
2 = image information
3 = candidate-initiated topic
4 = opponent-initiated topic
5 = moderator-initiated topic
6 = audience-initiated topic

Reasoning: _____

1 = analogy
2 = historical references
3 = factual illustration
4 = hypothetical illustration
5 = syllogism
6 = inductive reasoning
7 = deductive reasoning

Other: _____

1 = humor
2 = fear appeals
3 = nonfluencies
4 = one-sided message
5 = two-sided message
6 = conversational speaking style
7 = dynamic speaking style

Coder: _____ Hellweg

_____ Phillips